FREE

TAGA SPORTS

APRIL - JUNE 2015

Q&A: ALVIN REBONG

MY PAL: SPECIAL SPORTS FEST

'DOUBLE LIVES' OF STUDENT ATHLETES

TRAINING FOODS: GET TO KNOW THEM

SYNCHRONIZED SWIMMING ON SAIPAN

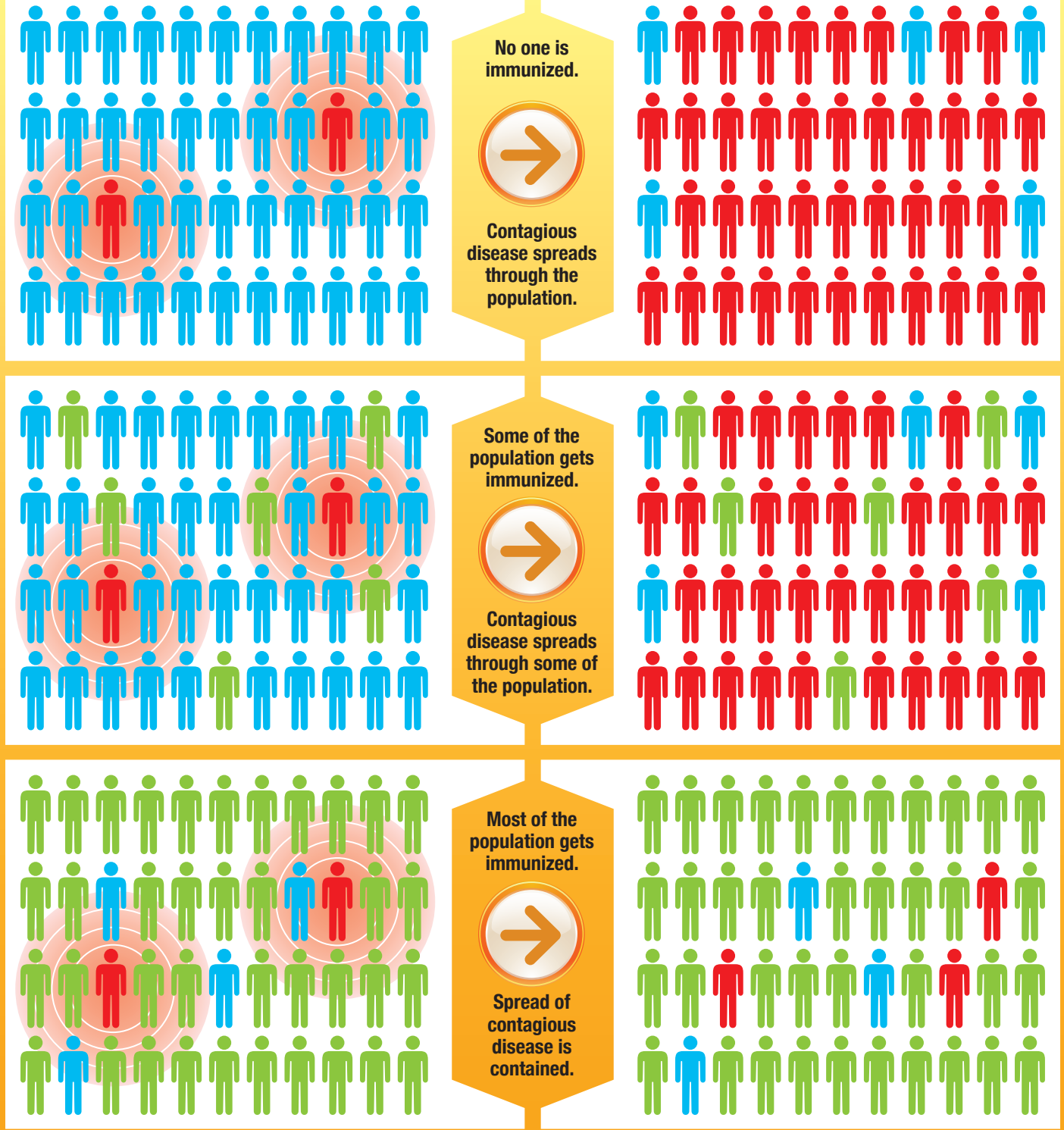
MICRONESIA'S HOMEGROWN SPORT

COMMUNITY IMMUNITY

= not immunized but still healthy

= immunized and healthy

= not immunized, sick, and contagious


No one is immunized.
Contagious disease spreads through the population.
Some of the population gets immunized.
Contagious disease spreads through some of the population.
Most of the population gets immunized.
Spread of contagious disease is contained.

DO YOUR PART TO PROTECT YOURSELF, YOUR LOVED ONES, AND THE COMMUNITY

Measles is a highly contagious disease that is easily preventable with vaccines, but some members of the community are not eligible for certain vaccines – such as infants, pregnant women, older people and/or immunocompromised individuals. If we each do our part by getting vaccinated and ensuring our children are up to date with age appropriate immunizations, we can protect ourselves and the community from vaccine preventable diseases.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

My father, a marine engineer by profession but a farmer in later life, went by nature's calendar when it came to his beloved crops. The year was always divided into three planting seasons for rice, with the farmland left fallow during the dry months of March, April, and May. In between, we would harvest coconuts every 40 days or so, which we would then convert into copra for sale. When in season, that routine includes harvesting ripe cacao pods that would be sun dried and later ground into a paste for chocolate treats. That's not to include the almost weekly chore of harvesting vegetables and fruits, picking tomatoes and beans, and gathering firewood. (This last was what I hated most about farm work. Running into a venomous cobra, its head up and its hood fully inflated as I picked up a fallen branch, is enough to turn you off the whole darn exercise)

This is not, however, a narrative about my father's middling farm. Rather, it's about the skills I learned as a kid while helping around, like how to climb a coconut tree, how to tell the difference between a young coconut that's perfect for snacking and a ripe coconut that's ready for harvesting, and, more importantly, how to husk a coconut in seconds flat. With hundreds to husk before the day ends, technique, rhythm, and stamina were important factors that come into play. And it literally was "play" for us—we would turn this mountainous task into a game on who could husk the most number of coconuts and the winner gets to have first dibs on the afternoon snacks. I was just about 12 years old then.

I was reminded of this as I was putting to bed this latest edition of TAGA *Sports*. Our associate editor, Mark Rabago, has a feature on Micronesian All Around, the region's version of the pentathlon. ***(See Page 16)*** Consisting of traditional island skills such as coconut tree climbing and coconut husking, among others, I never knew that the mundane skills I picked up while pottering around the farm could have earned me a berth in this athletic competition. By no means was I a champion coconut tree climber (it hurt my feet too much), nor was I great shakes in the diving or spear fishing department, but I'm sure I could have given someone a run for their money in the coconut husking segment! (Years later, I had nothing but pity for a city-bred cousin who didn't know how to open a young coconut without spilling the sweet water inside and contaminating the meat with dirt. He would be helpless when the Zombie Apocalypse comes.)

Anywhoo, welcome to the latest edition of TAGA *Sports*. We hope you'll enjoy reading it and, as always, email me at editor@saipantribune.com for comments, suggestions, and violent reactions.

JAYVEE VALLEJERA
Managing Editor

COVER ART
A participant in the 2006 Micronesian All Around touches the yellow ribbon to signal that he has completed the climb.

Photography by
SHAN SEMAN

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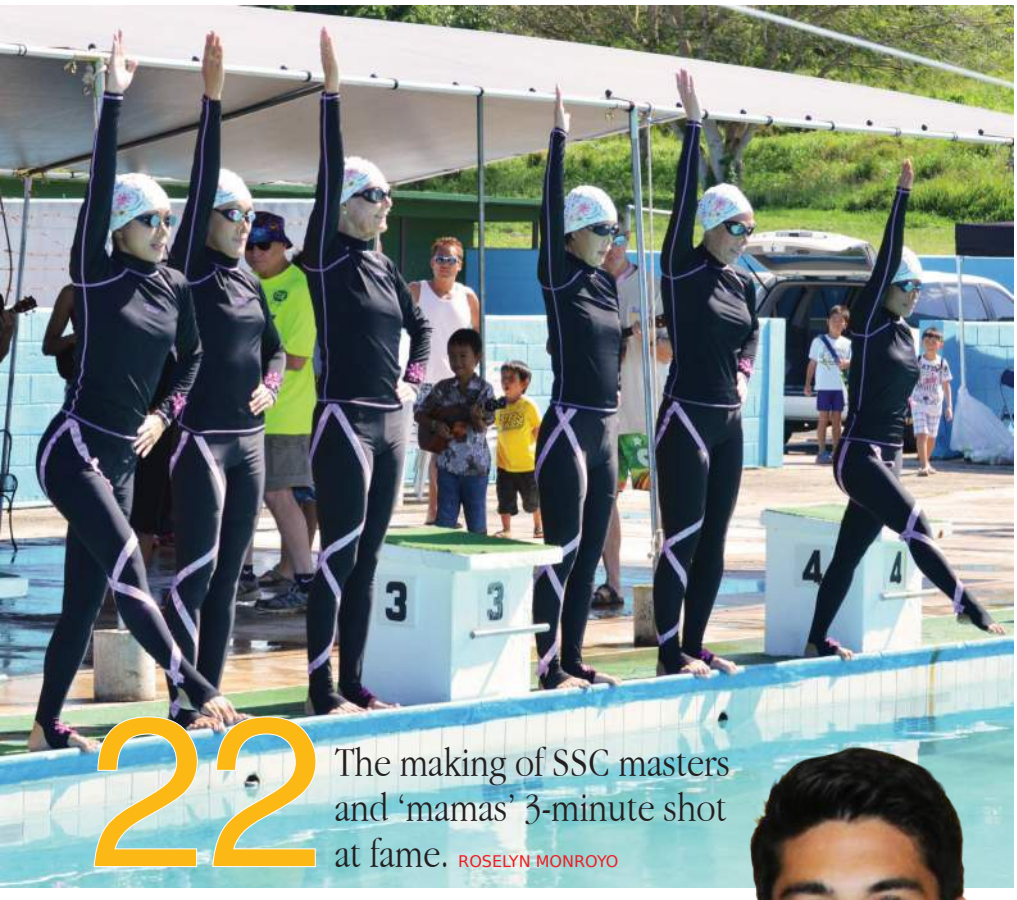

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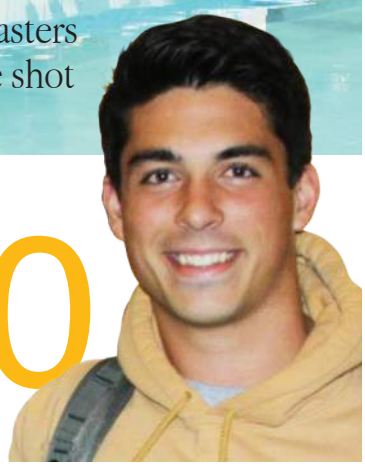

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WRITERS' BLOC

KAISA ANDERSON
Kaisa is a Registered Dietitian and works for PSS Food and Nutrition Services. Her only wish on Saipan would be for the students to eat their vegetables... because they are good for you! Also, she has become a fan of SUP, though it took many falls to find her balance.

ROSELYN MONROYO
Roselyn had a first when she saw Saipan Swim Club masters and mamas perform a synchronized swimming routine at the Kan Pacific Pool. Next on her bucket list is to watch a surfing competition.

JON PEREZ
Jon's father was the one who influenced him to get into sports. His father was a former varsity player in three sports—baseball, basketball, and football—in high school and college in their home province of Nueva Ecija in the Philippines.

MARK RABAGO
The only tree Mark climbed was the *malunggay* tree beside their old house in Las Pinas in the Philippines when he was 5 years old to escape *manang*'s order for him to take an afternoon nap. He had ill attempts at husking a coconut at his grandparents' house in Pangasinan but did succeed in grating a coconut while helping his mom make her delicious *ginatan* merienda.

JIM RAYPHAND
Jim currently works as the executive director for the Northern Marianas Protection & Advcacy Systems, Inc., better known as NMPASI, the state-designated protection and advocacy system for individuals with disabilities. Among the primary goals of NMPASI is to increase community awareness and understanding about disability-related issues.

Email letters to the editor to editor@saipantribune.com or mail to PMB 34, P.O. Box 10001, Saipan MP 96950. Submissions to TAGA Sports must include the writer's name, village address (no P.O. boxes), and daytime phone or mobile number. Letters may be edited for length and clarity and may be published or used in any medium. All submissions become the property of the publication and will not be returned.

KAISAANDERSON, RD
Contributing Writer

what to eat before, during and after training

The United States population is aware of the obesity and health problems facing our nation. In response, I believe the health and fitness industry has made a large push for their products and training programs. I also believe people are joining this "healthy living" push to better their lives. However, some basic nutrition information usually gets lost with these trendy programs and diet plans, making it difficult for newcomers to keep up with constant changes. Therefore, I felt the need to cover the basics of nutrition before, during, and after exercise to improve your results in the "healthy living" lifestyle.

BEFORE EXERCISE: BUILD UP

One of my favorite TV shows featured an episode where the supervisor of a company was competitively "carb loading" before a short 5K race. As humorous as this was for a television character to eat such a large amount for such a short race, it's common for people to make similar mistakes. Overeating before exercise can lead to stomach and digestion issues while exercising, as well as the possibility of leftover calories leading to the potential of turning into fat. Which is the opposite of your goal anyway, right? An athlete may follow the recommendation of 3 grams of carbohydrates per pound of body weight per day. Nevertheless, an athlete needs a carbohydrate-rich snack or meal, eaten with a small amount of protein, 3 to 4 hours before a long or hard training exercise to top off their muscle energy stores. Furthermore, hydrating with water or a sports drink 30 to 60 minutes before a long hard workout is recommended to avoid fatigue and limited performance. For example, a peanut butter and jam sandwich with milk, or a fruit smoothie made with yogurt and topped with granola, or a turkey and cheese sandwich with a sports drink are all good for pre-exercise foods leading up to a long training or exercise event.

DURING EXERCISE: MAINTAIN

Athletes doing prolonged exercising such as long training days, marathons or triathlons, or all-day sporting tournaments and events need to maintain their performance. For optimal results, these athletes require appropriate timing with the consumption of carbohydrates, fluids, and electrolytes. Carbohydrates are your body's first choice for energy, thus making it important for an athlete to consume adequate amounts to avoid fatigue. Mid-workout snacks recommended are for easy consumption and digestion. Such foods include a banana, bread with jam or honey, granola bar bits, or a sports bar. Additionally to prevent dehydration, consume adequate amounts of water, sports drinks, or coconut water to replace sweat and electrolyte loss during sporting events and training.

AFTER EXERCISE: RECOVERY

Your recovery snack/meal and fluids depend on the kind of athlete you are and the training that was performed to ensure proper muscle recovery. If you are an endurance athlete who finished a marathon, your body will be begging for some protein to restore its nitrogen balance. It's recommended you consume 0.5 to 0.6 grams of protein per pound per day. However, you will also need to accompany the protein with some carbs to help fuel the amino acids to build into the proteins your body needs to repair and recover. In contrast, strength training athletes' bodies can utilize protein more efficiently from routinely practicing resistance training; hence they will need more protein compared to an endurance athlete. But don't go crazy, they do not need much more protein than an endurance ath-

QUICK GUIDE TO FOODS FOR EXERCISE

	SNACK	MEAL	FLUIDS
BEFORE EXERCISE	Fruit Smoothie made with Yogurt and Berries	Turkey and Cheese Sandwich	Sports Drink Water
DURING EXERCISE	Banana Roll with Jam Granola Bar	Sports Energy Bar	Sports Drink Water Coconut Water
AFTER EXERCISE	Graham Crackers with Nut Butter and Banana	Stir Fry with Lean Steak, Broccoli, Bell Peppers, Carrots and Brown Rice	Sports Drink Low-Fat Chocolate Milk Water Coconut Water

lete; it's recommended they consume 0.5 to 0.7 grams of protein per pound of body weight per day. Great recovery foods include smoothies made with yogurt and berries, sports drink or sports bar, graham crackers with a nut butter and banana and some delicious low-fat chocolate milk. Keep everything in balance!

For a quick guide and more information take a look at the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Practice Group for Sports, Cardiovascular, and Wellness Nutrition. They have simple fact sheets that offer quick tips, athlete scenarios for nutrition needs, and athlete nutritional goals. It's a great resource for basic needs for every athlete and aspiring athlete. Keep sweating!

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(Healthy Outcomes for Maternal and Early Childhood)

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- INFANT MASSAGE
- DEVELOPMENTAL SCREENING & ACTIVITIES
- JOB SEARCH
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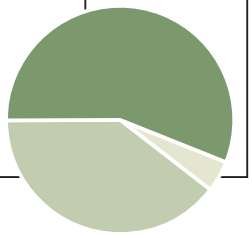
Health hazards of sitting

Studies show that sitting for more than 95 percent of the time at work increases the risk for physical injury and disease.

Average activity during waking hours



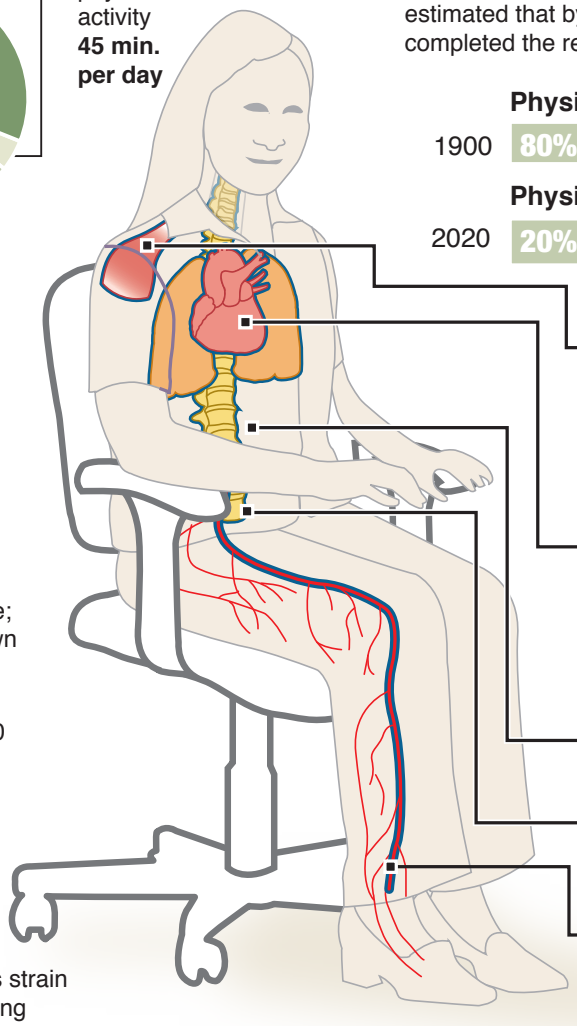
Sedentary **9 hr 20 min. per day**

Moderate to vigorous physical activity **45 min. per day**

Low-intensity physical activity **6 hr 30 min. per day**

From the farm to the office

A century ago in the U.S., 80 percent of the workforce was involved in physical labor, including 11.5 million farmers; today there are about 851,000 farmers, and it is estimated that by 2020 the workforce will have completed the reversal from physical labor to office work



Over time

Holding the muscles in the torso, neck and shoulders in a somewhat fixed position squeezes blood vessels, reducing blood flow and causing fatigue

Many people experience decreased fitness, reduced lung and heart efficiency and a higher risk for injury and disease, especially those who are otherwise inactive

Insulin effectiveness drops and risk of diabetes rises

High amounts of stress are placed on the spine, specifically the lower back and neck

Blood often pools in the lower legs, which can cause numbness and varicose veins

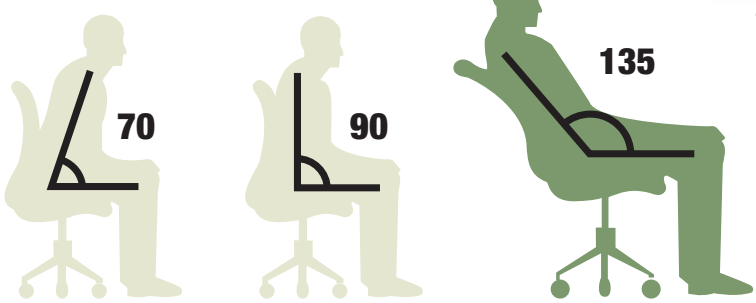
How sitting harms the body

- **As soon as you sit**
  Electrical activity in the leg muscles shuts off; calorie burning drops to 1 per minute; enzymes that help break down fat drop by 90 percent
- **After 2 hours**
  Good cholesterol drops by 20 percent

Two changes to make

Adjust the seat

Sitting at 135 degrees puts less strain on your lower back than hunching forward or even sitting straight



Get up and move

The recommended 30 minutes of activity per day is not enough; interrupt sitting whenever you can:

- Walk around the office
- Take the stairs
- Walk to coworker instead of messaging

Source: MedicalBillingandCoding.net, British Medical Journal, The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, Businessweek, The New York Times, Science Daily, ehow.com, Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety

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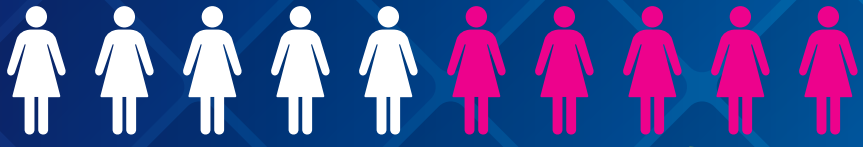
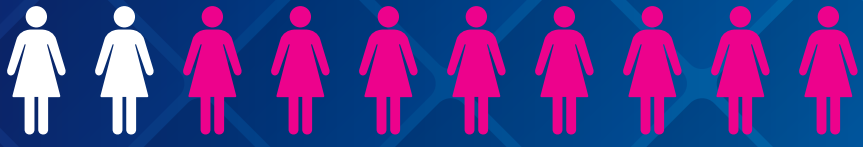
During 2013 in the CNMI, there were **57** deliveries to mothers who had complications relating to **diabetes, gestational diabetes,** and associated conditions.



45% of the **Infant Deaths** and **17%** of the **Fetal Deaths** were born to mothers with diabetes, gestational diabetes, or to one or more of the associated complications



The following symptoms of diabetes are typical. However, some people with type 2 diabetes have symptoms so mild they go unnoticed. Common symptoms of diabetes:

- Urinating often
- Feeling very hungry - even though you are eating
- Blurry vision
- Weight loss - even though you are eating more (type 1)
- Tingling, pain or numbness in the hands/feet (type 2)

Preconception health is important for all women and men, whether or not they plan to have a baby one day. Take good care of your health. See a healthcare provider.

Diabetes, gestational diabetes, and the complications alike, doesn't just affect the mothers...it affects all of us.

Commonwealth Healthcare Corp. · Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands · Established October 2011

Maternal & Child Health Bureau

For more information, call us at:
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Champion bodybuilder ALVIN REBONG

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

Bodybuilding champion Alfredo "Alvin" Rebong Jr. studied to be a pastor in college but found himself preaching the tenets of good health and physical fitness instead, as a gym instructor first at Aqua Resort Club and now at Saipan World Resort.

TAGA *Sports* recently caught up with the 44-year-old winner of the Marianas Muscle Bodybuilding Competition and he revealed how he wound up on Saipan, how he managed to win despite less then two months training, his lifelong love of bodybuilding, and how the sport is not actually just about lifting weights.

How did you got involved in bodybuilding?

I started when I was in college. I took up theology at Foursquare Bible College in the Philippines. I've always been active in church but I wanted to be more involved so I went to Bible college, not actually to become a pastor but to gain more knowledge for ministry. While there, I also got involved in mixed martial arts and the Filipino-style kickboxing, Yaw-Yan. I eventually shifted to bodybuilding when I was 21 years old when I started working out at the public gym in Makati.

When did you become a fitness instructor?

I always loved sports and weightlifting so after college I went to work at Fitness International Philippines in Makati. It just so happened that Rockwell Power Plant in Bell Air opened a fitness club and I was recruited and became a pioneer there in 1999-2000.

You were already a fitness instructor in one of the most exclusive gyms in the Philippines. Why did you move to Saipan?

Zarina Naruko, who recruits workers for Aqua Resort

JON V. PEREZ

Club, was a member of the Rockwell Power Plant gym. She usually works out during non-peak hours and I became one of her instructors. I probably did a good job since after a few months she asked me if I wanted to work…on Saipan. She offered me a job as a gym supervisor. I didn't think she was serious at first and I also was mulling another job offer in the Middle East. But she was very persistent and I relented. I arrived and pioneered the gym at Aqua Resort Club in 2001 and worked there for 13 years.

How did you wind up at World Resort?

I had some trials because of 9/11 in 2001 and then the Japan tsunami in 2011. I moved to Saipan World Resort in 2013 after doing part-time work at Gold's Gym. I'm now a spa attendant and gym instructor at World Resort's Spaness. It's been very busy. I have daily class instruction for guests and members. Very busy and it's actually more busy than when I was working as a gym supervisor at Aqua Resort.

Was last month's bodybuilding competition your first on Saipan?

It was actually my second competition. My first was way back in the mid-2000s, but I didn't win because I didn't do steroids. The latest was an all-natural one but no testing was actually done, but there was a gentlemen's agreement not to use steroids. Everyone seemed to have stuck to the agreement because you could see that no participant bulked up.

How hard did you train for the competition?

Preparation was really hard. I was actually eyeing the September competition. I was only told about the Marianas Muscle Bodybuilding Competition two months before the competition. Diet was all-protein. You have to nourish your muscles with protein without fats. I ate only chicken without skin like chicken breast, turkey, fish, a little bit of rice but only steamed rice and not fried rice. Dieting is especially hard for me because as an employee I can eat for free at the buffet of World Resort. So it was really a sacrifice.

What was your routine in the two months leading up to the competition?

It was actually short of two months, more like a month and 27 days. I did three hours of cardio workout at least everyday. My goal was to cut 3-5 percent of my body fat before the competition and I was able to achieve that. I ended up working out until midnight by jogging home to Garapan to meet my workout goals. Actually cardio workout is better than lifting weights if you want to lose weight very fast.

So doing cardio was more important to you than lifting weights when you were training for the competition?

Yes. Here's my formula: Brisk walking and light jogging for at least 60 minutes. Not too intense because that tends to burn less calories. With intense but short bursts, you burn calories, fats, and carbohydrates but 60 minutes of brisk walking to light jogging, you actually burn 60 to 70 percent fat. During my training 85 to 90 percent was devoted to cardio; the rest was for lifting weights.

How about your diet? What types of food did you avoid when you were training?

Soft drinks, oily food, sweets were no-nos…as in zero. As I said, I ate a lot of protein-packed food without the fat like chicken and turkey breast. I also ate lentil beans, oats, salad but only greens; Subway was also a great help. I was hungry after the competition so I ate the remaining sweet potato (*kamote*) and hard-boiled eggs (6) without the yolk that I brought to the competition. I attended Bible study after and luckily they had prepared mahi-mahi *sinigang* and I feasted on that.

What's your advice to people who want to take up bodybuilding as a sport?

Work out hard and train hard. If you're healthy and want to compete in bodybuilding, you have to train everyday—one hour everyday at the very least. Don't believe in the workout fads on TV. These are just for business and making money. Go back to basics—cardio by walking and running and, of course, lifting weights. Sleep is also crucial. Six hours of sleep a day is the minimum and napping should only be 20 minutes. After a workout, don't eat immediately. Give it at least 30 minutes and the same is true with naps. TS

Simple tips to get kids to eat better, exercise more

NANCIHELLMICH
USA Today

Currently, about a third of kids in this country are overweight or obese, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Extra pounds put kids at a higher risk of type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, liver disease, sleep apnea and other health problems.

Some ideas from nutrition and exercise researchers on setting up a healthier home environment:

- **PLAN HEALTHY, TASTY BREAKFASTS.** Offer children a lean protein at breakfast such as eggs, string cheese, Canadian bacon, turkey bacon or hummus, childhood obesity expert Melinda Sothern says. Serve them fresh fruit such as berries. Or whole-grain cereal with nuts is another option. Top off the meal with a glass of fat-free or 1 percent low-fat milk or a carton of low-fat yogurt, she says.
- **DISCOURAGE MINDLESS MUNCHING.** Don't let kids eat in front of the TV or computer and gradually restrict all eating and drinking, except for water, to the kitchen counter, table or dining room.
- **GET THEM INVOLVED.** Take kids to the grocery store. Skip the soda, cookie and candy aisles and have children select one fruit and vegetable to try each week. At home, include children in lunch and dinner preparation.
- **REINSTATE FAMILY TRADITIONS.** Insist on family dinners, set the table with real cloth napkins, light candles and play soft music in the background to encourage discussion. Compliment the children on their healthy food selections, cooking and manners.
- **GET SOME SHUT-EYE.** Allow kids no more than one hour of media time before bedtime. Try to make sure they get the required 9 to 10 hours of sleep a night. Research shows that lack of sleep equals unwanted weight gain, behavioral problems and difficulty concentrating the next day.
- **OFFER A NUTRITIOUS STARTER COURSE.** Research shows that adults who eat a broth-based bowl of vegetable soup; a large, low-calorie, lettuce-based salad; or an apple before a meal consume about 110 to 190 fewer calories at the meal, including the calories in that first course. The same idea could work with kids. They'll not only fill up on fewer calories, but they'll be eating a healthy first course.
- **TRICK THEIR TUMMIES.** Add their favorite fiber-rich vegetables—such as spinach, zucchini, yellow squash, broccoli, carrots, peppers and onions—to lasagna, casseroles, pasta dishes and pizza. The veggies lower the calories and increase the nutrients in each bite. Also increase the proportion of vegetables in stir-fry dishes, broth-based soups and stews and extra vegetables to sandwiches. Substitute vegetable or fruit purees for half or even two-thirds of the added fat in quick breads and muffins.
- **USE SMALLER PLATES.** A study of first-graders showed that most kids served themselves more at lunch (about 90 calories more) when they used adult-sized dinner plates compared with using child-sized plates, which is about the size of an adult salad plate.
- **SWAP SEDENTARY TIME FOR ACTIVE TIME.** Kids only burn 30 to 50 calories when they are sitting for an hour, but they burn 400 to 500 calories in an hour if they are playing tag, dancing or doing field sports. The government's physical activity guidelines say children and teens should do an hour or more of moderate-intensity to vigorous aerobic physical activity each day. Let them do at least two hours of physical activity a day.
- **TEACH KIDS TO DANCE.** Tell them you're playing Dancing with the Stars and let them waltz, do the cha-cha-cha or swing dance. This active time will burn four to five times more calories than sitting and improve their overall health.
- **PLAY OUTSIDE WITH YOUR CHILDREN.** Moms and dads should teach their kids to throw, pitch, catch, pass, jump and ride a bike because their kids may not be learning these important skills at school.
- **ENCOURAGE PHYSICAL-ACTIVITY BREAKS.** When kids are doing their homework or on the computer, they need to get up regularly and move around or consider standing while they are working. Every little bit of activity counts. Have them do at least 20 to 30 minutes of physical activity after school, such as shooting hoops, biking, playing soccer, jumping rope, dancing, walking or playing a fitness-related video game.
- **STEER CLEAR OF SUGARY DRINKS.** This includes regular sodas, sweet teas, high-calorie specialty coffees, energy drinks and juices. It's such an easy way to cut out excess sugar and calories. Instead offer water and low-fat milk, even low-fat chocolate milk. TS

FEATURE

The 'double lives' of student athletes

ROSELYN MONROYO
TAGA Sports Staff Writer

In a few months, it will be graduation time. Scores of the CNMI's high school graduates will leave the islands to pursue higher education. Most of them will be full-time college students, while some may choose a more challenging path and become student-athletes.

Academia itself demands rigor—a strict taskmaster that is unforgiving in the claims it makes on one's limited time, sleep, and concentration. But that is nothing when you throw into the mix the taxing constraints of sports. Straddling both worlds while striving to excel in both require a different kind of focus, a hybrid form of discipline that makes for exceptional personalities.

TAGA *Sports* pooled some of the Commonwealth's student-athletes to give those considering a "double life" in college an idea of how things work in their world.

SEE **PAGE 12**

Name: Joshua Jones
School: University of West Alabama
Sport: Baseball
Team: Tigers
Position: Starting pitcher and long reliever
Division: NCAA Division 2 Gulf Southeast Conference.
Career Highlights: Before moving to UWA, he helped Colby Community College win a championship in 2013. As a freshman at Colby, he struck out 73 in 80.1 innings pitch. He also led the CNMI to a gold medal win in the 2011 Pacific Games.

"Be humble and play the sport that you love. It is also important to have fun no matter what you do. Stay committed to your studies and sport. It takes a lot of hard work on the field and in the weight room to become a better athlete. With my talent, it was worth it to bring it here to compete and work harder on my game."

Name: Leina Kim
School: Colorado State University, Pueblo
Sport: Women's Golf
Team: Thunderwolves
Position: Team Co-Captain
Division: NCAA Division II, Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference
Career Highlights: Ranked No. 1 in Division II at golfstat.com (as of March 24)

"Being a student-athlete is not easy. You have to be able to balance school and your sport at the same time. As a golfer, sometimes our tournaments are a week after school starts and you skip a lot of school days to compete. You always have to stay on top of your schoolwork and definitely your sport. You can't just walk in and assume you will be on top; you have to work your way to be the best. Once you are on a team, you have to be a team player. If you do not get along with your teammates, do whatever you can to fix it. Golf is an individual sport, but it is definitely a team sport in college. You have to support one another no matter how hard it gets."

SPORTS CALENDAR

APRIL

Saipan Marathon: The biggest annual run race on the island draws over 500 on and off-island competitors in 10K, half marathon, marathon, and ultra marathon.

Hafa Adai 5K: This unique event which Pacific Islands Club is organizing for the second straight year will have runners getting a splash of colored powder as they cross four designated areas along the course.

CNMI Junior Tennis Championships: The Commonwealth's finest junior tennis players slug it out for the age group crowns and the ranking points they need to make it to the CNMI team that will compete in a regional event.

NMC Foundation Open Golf Tournament: This is a fundraising event with proceeds going to Northern Marianas College's various programs.

MAY

McDonald's/PSS All Schools Athletics Championships: The Northern Marianas Athletics-organized event gathers together the various schools' bets in running, throwing, and jumping events.

IT&E Mixed Doubles and Singles Badminton Tournament: Northern Marianas Badminton Association' second tournament for the season and pits players from the five member clubs.

CNMI District Tournament: Teams from Saipan, Tinian, and Rota battle for the rights to represent the CNMI to the Asia Pacific/Middle East Regional Baseball Tournament.

Rites of Passage 18: Trench Tech's second offering for the season and opens door for newcomer hoping to make a name in MMA.

JUNE

MISO Girls Fast-pitch Softball League: One of Marianas Interscholastic Sports Organization's season-ending competition that features girls high school teams from Marianas High School, Kagman High School, Saipan Southern High School, and Mt. Carmel School.

North Pacific Regional Championships: Selected players from the CNMI will square off against Guam, Palau, and Federated States of Micronesia's netters for slots on the North Pacific Team that will compete in the Pacific Oceania Junior Championships in Fiji.

Asia Pacific/Middle East Regional Baseball Tournament: Saipan will host Junior, Senior, and Big League teams from Asia and the Middle East with the participating squad fighting for slots to the World Series.

This advertisement is sponsored by Tan Siu Lin Foundation

Name: Savali Talalemotu
School: Portland State University
Sport: Football
Team: Vikings
Position: Defensive End
Division: NCAA Division 1, Big Sky Conference
Career Highlights: Started out as a walk-on in 2012, became a starter in his sophomore season and led the team in sacks.

> Put God first before anything else and no one can stop you.

Name: Michael Barry
School: Saint Leo University
Sport: Soccer
Team: Saint Leo Lions
Position: Right back
Division: NCAA Division 2
Career Highlights: Suited up for the CNMI Men's National Team that earned a historic win against Macau in 2014. A red shirt freshman for the Lions, who were once ranked No. 3, are Top 25 this year, and made it to the Final 8 in the NCAA tournament in 2014.

> Wake up every morning and have one thing in your mind, which is to be better than yesterday. Guam was once in the position that we are now, and now they are playing for a World Cup bid.

Name: Thea Fernando Minor
School: New Mexico Military Institute
Sport: Tennis
Team: Lady Broncos
Position: Plays No. 2 in singles
Division: NJCAA Division 1
Career Highlights: Won her season debut both in doubles and singles and beat an NCAA Division 1 player in an invitational tournament. Ranked No. 7 in doubles and No. 22 in singles.

> Continue your journey. Play and strive to work harder both in your game and studies to have a good future.

SEE **PAGE 14**

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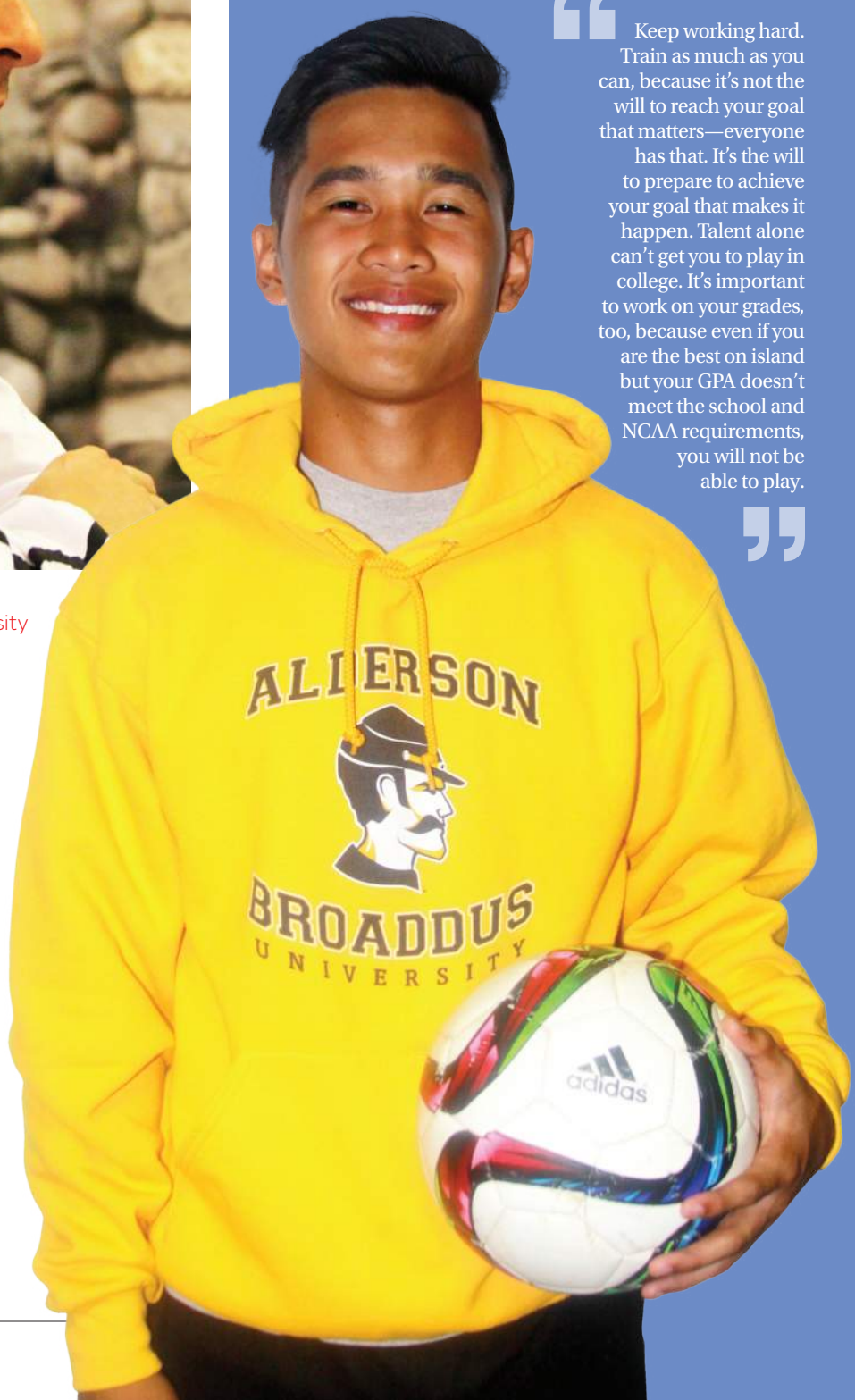
Name: Lucas Knecht
School: Georgia Southwestern State University
Sport: Soccer
Team: Hurricanes
Position: Center Defender
Division: NCAA Division II, Peach Belt Conference
Career Highlights: Named all county junior and senior year of high school, the world's youngest male to play in an international football competition (he was 14). He beat Clayton State in a grudge match in his freshman year.

"Don't stop, whatever it may be. Keep pushing. You can't wait for things to happen to you, you have to make them happen yourself. Then, when you get where you want to be, remember you must not relieve your efforts but continue to excel because there will always be someone better and they'll be looking to take the spot you worked so hard for."

Name: Enrico Dominic T. Del Rosario
School: Alderson Broaddus University (West Virginia)
Sport: Soccer
Team: The Battlers
Position: Defender
Division: NCAA Division 2, Great Midwest Athletic Conference
Career Highlights: Played for the CNMI men's and youth national teams and was part of the many-time NMIFA youth league champion MP United Football Club. He was signed up by Alderson Broaddus as a freshman.



"Keep working hard. Train as much as you can, because it's not the will to reach your goal that matters—everyone has that. It's the will to prepare to achieve your goal that makes it happen. Talent alone can't get you to play in college. It's important to work on your grades, too, because even if you are the best on island but your GPA doesn't meet the school and NCAA requirements, you will not be able to play."

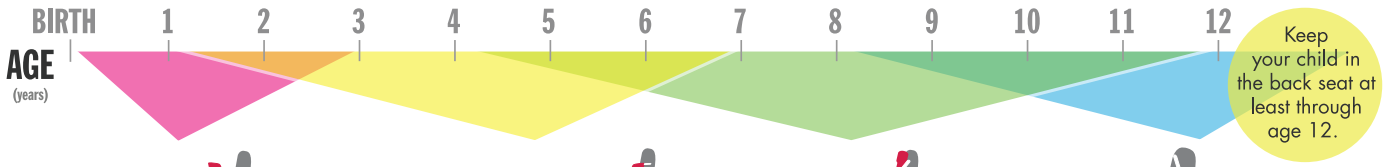
CLICK-IT OR TICKET

National Seat Belt Enforcement Mobilization

May 11 - 25, 2015

Car Seat Recommendations for Children

- Select a car seat based on your child's age and size, and choose a seat that fits in your vehicle and use it every time.
- Always refer to your specific car seat manufacturer's instructions; read the vehicle owner's manual on how to install the car seat using the seat belt or LATCH system; and check height and weight limits.
- To maximize safety, keep your child in the car seat for as long as possible, as long as the child fits within the manufacturer's height and weight requirements.
- Keep your child in the back seat at least through age 12.



REAR-FACING CAR SEAT

Your child under age 1 should always ride in a rear-facing car seat. There are different types of rear-facing car seats: Infant-only seats can only be used rear-facing. Convertible and 3-in-1 car seats typically have higher height and weight limits for the rear-facing position, allowing you to keep your child rear-facing for a longer period of time.

FORWARD-FACING CAR SEAT

Keep your child rear-facing as long as possible. It's the best way to keep him or her safe. Your child should remain in a rear-facing car seat until he or she reaches the top height or weight limit allowed by your car seat's manufacturer. Once your child outgrows the rear-facing car seat, your child is ready to travel in a forward-facing car seat with a harness.

BOOSTER SEAT

Keep your child in a forward-facing car seat with a harness until he or she reaches the top height or weight limit allowed by your car seat's manufacturer. Once your child outgrows the forward-facing car seat with a harness, it's time to travel in a booster seat, but still in the back seat.

SEATBELT

Keep your child in a booster seat until he or she is big enough to fit in a seat belt properly. For a seat belt to fit properly the lap belt must lie snugly across the upper thighs, not the stomach. The shoulder belt should lie snug across the shoulder and chest and not cross the neck or face. Remember: your child should still ride in the back seat because it's safer there.

DESCRIPTION (RESTRAINT TYPE)

A **REAR-FACING CAR SEAT** is the best seat for your young child to use. It has a harness and in a crash, cradles and moves with your child to reduce the stress to the child's fragile neck and spinal cord.

A **FORWARD-FACING CAR SEAT** has a harness and tether that limits your child's forward movement during a crash.

A **BOOSTER SEAT** positions the seat belt so that it fits properly over the stronger parts of your child's body.

A **SEAT BELT** should lie across the upper thighs and be snug across the shoulder and chest to restrain the child safely in a crash. It should not rest on the stomach area or across the neck.

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Micronesia's homegrown sport: MICRONESIAN ALL AROUND

MICRONESIAN ALL AROUND RULES

Note: The rules are modified depending on the Micronesian Games Organizing Committee. For example, in the 2006 Micro Games on Saipan, instead of climbing up and descending from just three coconut trees, athletes had to do it with five.

The Micro All Around is a sport consisting of traditional island skills specific to Micronesia, completed by athletes. Events for males are coconut tree climbing, coconut husking, spear throwing, run/swim, and diving. The events for females are coconut husking, coconut grating, spear throwing, run/swim, and diving.

COCONUT TREE CLIMBING

In order to win the coconut tree climbing, athletes must climb up and down three coconut trees consecutively in the fastest time. Participants must climb 20 feet up each coconut tree, ring a bell to signify they have reached the top, then climb back down the tree to 6 feet above the ground before letting go of the tree.

COCONUT HUSKING (Male and Female)

This event involves athletes husking 10 coconuts in the fastest time possible, the quickest winning. On completion, all coconuts must be clean, without the presence of any coconut fibers. All husking implements must be wooden and can be used by any competitor. This is a timed event, with the quickest time winning.

COCONUT GRATING (Women)

This event involves athletes grating five coconuts, 10 halves in total. No gratable coconut can remain in the coconut shell after an athlete's completion. This is a timed event, with the quickest time winning.

RUN/SWIM

The run/swim event is timed, with the athlete completing in the fastest time receiving 20 points, the second fastest receiving 19 points, and so on. This event involves athletes first running 10 meters to the edge of the lagoon and diving into the water. They must swim 100 meters, at which point the athlete will turn around and head back to shore. This is a timed event, with the quickest time winning.

DIVING

Athletes will be taken out on a boat to a water depth of 10 to 15 feet for men and 8 to 10 feet for women. Here they will dive for five objects each. A timer starts from when the athlete enters the water until he/she has retrieved the last object and all the objects are in the boat. Only one object may be retrieved at a time and it must be placed in the boat before diving for the next. The scoring is the same as the run/swim, with the fastest being awarded 20 points, the second 19 points, and so on.

SPEAR THROWING

Five coconuts will be placed in the water at three different distances; distances for men are 10 feet, 20 feet, and 30 feet; distances for women are 10 feet, 15 feet, and 20 feet. Each athlete is allowed one practice throw at each distance. Each competitor will have five throws at each distance. No points will be awarded for simple touching or grazing of the target; the spear must stick in the target. For each stick of a coconut, a thrower is awarded points corresponding to the distance of the coconut. For example, athlete A sticks a spear in a coconut at 10 feet and earns 10 points. Same athlete sticks a spear in a coconut at 20 feet and is awarded 20 points, etc. Points are added up for each athlete. The athlete with the most points is judged the winner.

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

You can say the Micronesian All Around is the region's version of the Pentathlon, albeit consisting of traditional island skills specific to Micronesia such as coconut tree climbing, coconut husking (men)/coconut grating (women), run/swim, diving, and spear fishing.

The CNMI's Dr. Kurt Barnes developed the sport along with the Marshall Islands' Jack Helkena and fellow Peace Corps volunteer and pro football player Al Snyder in 1969 for the precursor of the Micronesian Games, the Micronesian Olympics.

"During the planning for the 1969 Micronesian Games, the organizing committee decided to set up a competition utilizing traditional, everyday island skills. The five skills decided upon where coconut tree climbing, coconut husking, spear throwing, swimming, and diving for objects in semi-deep water. The Micronesian All Around has been held at every Micro Games. Sometimes, the host nation changes the rules and or events to suit their fancy, but every Micro Games has held the sport," Barnes told TAGA *Sports*.

During the first-ever Micronesian Olympics on Saipan in 1969, Katsuchi Skang of Palau won the gold medal with compatriot Paulus Kumangai and Yap's Peter Tuwun taking home the silver and the bronze, respectively.

Through the years, competitors from Palau, Pohnpei, and the Marshall Islands would dominate the competition, with Pohnpei's Eugene Alfons winning the past four gold medals in 2002, 2006, 2010, and 2014.

Barnes, who has been overseeing the Micronesian All Around competition starting in 1969 and since the Micro Games' revival beginning in 1990 on Saipan, said the region's homegrown Pentathlon event is so unique that ESPN—the self-styled world leader in sports—wanted to cover the event in 2006 during the Micro Games on Saipan.

"It's unique since only in Micronesia is there islander skills competition. Other islands may have a coconut-husking contest once in a while, but an organized competition using five traditional skills does not exist anyplace. ESPN has tried several times to get a cameraman to the Micro Games to film the competition," he said.

Barnes, now a retired instructor at the Northern Marianas College and vice president of the Northern Marianas Sports Association, said the most mind-boggling feat he witnessed in the Micronesian All Around was when Mariano Gilmete of Pohnpei husked 10 coconuts in under 50 seconds in 1990.

"The most incredible feat in the eight Micronesian All Around held was an athlete from Pohnpei, Gilmete, in 1990 husked 10 coconuts in 48 seconds. I don't think I would believe this if someone told me since each coconut was husked in 4.8 seconds. But I was there as the head official and as a timer for the coconut husking competition. Also, another Pohnpeian husked the 10 coconuts in 54.5 seconds at the last Micro Games in Pohnpei."

Unfortunately, CNMI representatives to the Micronesian All Around have never been competitive in the sport.

"CNMI has never won a medal, not came close to one. Traditional skills are not practiced to the intensity that it needs to take to be a competitive athlete. If the CNMI wanted to become a major player in the Micronesian All Around, there would have to be serious competition available for aspiring athletes, plus very intense training and practices."

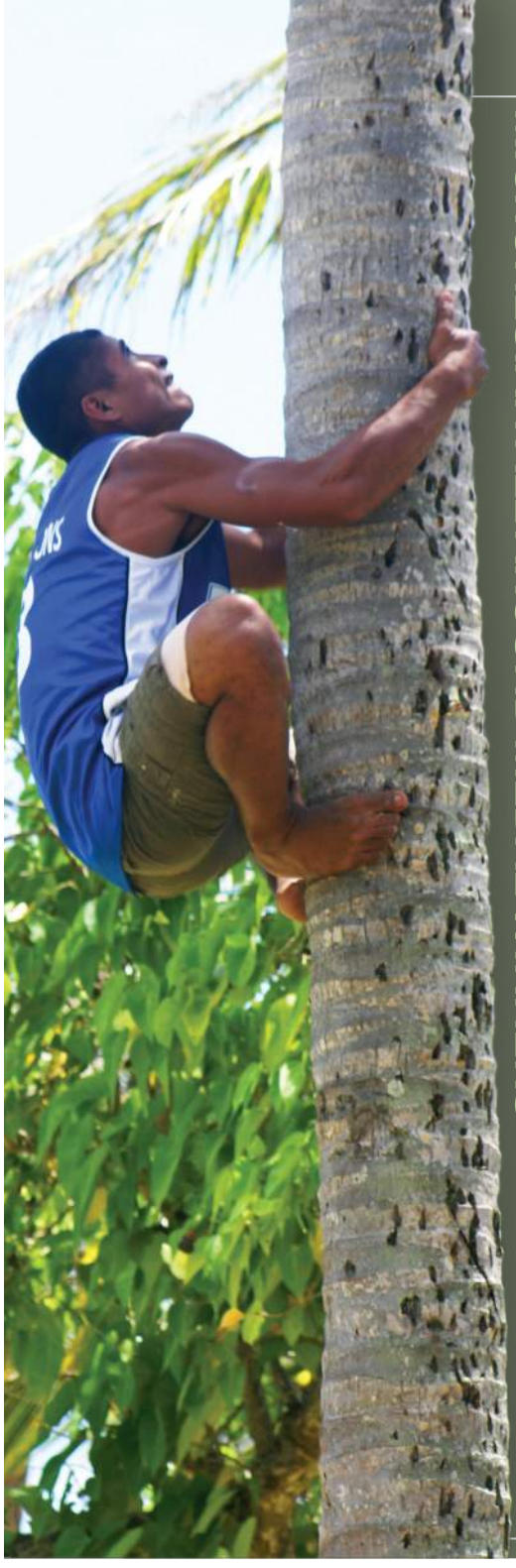
Mastering five skills is a tough undertaking, both mentally and physically. In the 2006 Micro Games on Saipan, for instance, participants had to climb five coconut trees and most competitors, including the CNMI's bets, were completely exhausted after the third tree.

The CNMI's seeming disinterest in becoming a power in the indigenous sport is regrettable, considering that the unique sport seemed to have a built-in fan base on the islands, with the competition in 2006 attracting a big crowd, according to Barnes.

"During the 2006 Micro Games, the Micronesian All Around was held on the beach in Tanapag Village. About 100 spectators were in attendance during the two-day competition and most everyone present said it was the best sport, other than the championship baseball game of the Micro Games. It was spectacular. From the spear throwing at objects in the water, to the 400m swim and fighting the current in the Tanapag channel, to the coconut tree climbing and husking. It was spectacular. Wish CNN or ESPN could have been present," he said.

As for the future of the sport in the CNMI, Barnes said he would meet with his fellow NMSA officials to create a yearlong program for the Micronesian All Around. One key is to establish an annual event that would ultimately invite other Micronesian All Around athletes from around the region to compete here on Saipan.

He said another option is tapping the Marianas Visitors Authority to help grow the sport since it could not only be beneficial to the CNMI's campaign in the Micro Games but could also be an added tourist attraction to the islands.



MICRONESIAN ALL AROUND MEDAL WINNERS

1st Micronesian Games (1969, Saipan)

MEN	Gold	Katsuchi Skang, Palau
	Silver	Paulus Kumangai, Palau
	Bronze	Peter Tuwun, Yap

2nd Micronesian Games (1990, Saipan)

MEN	Gold	Mariano Gilmete, Pohnpei
	Silver	Rosendo Skang, Palau
	Bronze	Bechesseichad Rekemesik, Palau

3rd Micronesian Games (1994, Guam)

MEN	Gold	Ngiratatatang Ldesel, Palau
	Silver	Rosendo Skang, Palau
	Bronze	Mariano Gilmete, Pohnpei
WOMEN	Gold	Burang Skang, Palau
	Silver	Lulita Belbei, Palau
	Bronze	Leonida Hatles, Pohnpei

4th Micronesian Games (1998, Palau)

MEN	Gold	Rembi Osomi, Chuuk
	Silver	Jonah Henley, Pohnpei
	Silver	Gerald Teblak, Palau
	Bronze	Todley Kilikun, Kosrae
WOMEN	Gold	Burang Skang, Palau
	Silver	Melinda Olpet, Pohnpei
	Bronze	Masumi Une, Pohnpei

5th Micronesian Games (2002, Pohnpei)

MEN	Gold	Eugene Alfons, Pohnpei
	Silver	Ioanis Araisang, Pohnpei
	Bronze	Balldazar Paulino, Kosrae
WOMEN	Gold	Paloma Martin, Pohnpei
	Silver	Senrina Hadley, Pohnpei
	Bronze	Mary Rose Sekool, Palau

6th Micronesian Games (2006, Saipan)

MEN	Gold	Eugene Alfons, Pohnpei
	Silver	Atii Atii, Marshalls
	Bronze	Stalin Stanley, Palau
WOMEN	Gold	Burang Skang, Palau
	Silver	Jessica Blaiks, Palau*

*Awarded silver medal but medal does not count in medal standings.

7th Micronesian Games (2010, Palau)

MEN	Gold	Eugene Alfons, Pohnpei
	Silver	Atii Atii, Marshalls
	Bronze	Doug Franz, Palau
WOMEN	Gold	Jessica Blaiks, Palau
	Silver	Julita Belilei, Palau

8th Micronesian Games (2014, Ponhpei)

MEN	Gold	Eugene Alfons, Pohnpei
	Silver	Joseph Ramon, Palau
	Bronze	William Route, Pohnpei
WOMEN	Gold	Hadleen Ardos, Pohnpei
	Silver	RayJean Gilmete, Pohnpei
	Bronze	Joy Ngirngesis, Palau

Saipan: The

JON PEREZ
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

> People have to chip in and work together so that these races won't die. The Saipan Sportsfest is a tradition that needs to be continued.

pros' home away from home

Saipan's picturesque backdrop, rugged terrain, and its friendly people are some of the reasons why most of the professional triathletes that regularly compete in the Tagaman Triathlon and XTERRA Saipan keep coming back to the island.

Reigning champion Ben Allen of Australia and his girlfriend, Jacqui Slack, of the United Kingdom, said that Saipan has become a second home where they look forward to the people's warm personality.

"For the past three years, Jacqui and I enjoy staying with Steve and Kimiko McKagan instead of staying in a hotel. We've been enjoying the island life, home cooking, dogs, and meeting people with different cultures. Those things and the welcoming smile of the people make you want to come back every year," said Allen.

He has no problem with paying extra fees to bring his road and mountain bikes, just to be able to race on the beautiful island of Saipan. "I will always do that. Saipan is one of those places I love to be on every year."

Slack, agrees.

"XTERRA Saipan is a very nice event to race because the course is so natural and rugged. You'll see Saipan's natural and raw beauty in the bike and run legs," said Slack, who in 2014 finished third in the XTERRA Saipan women's division while her boyfriend ruled the men's side.

Austrians Carina Wasle, the 2014 XTERRA Saipan champion, and Markus Benesch also share similar sentiments.

"You can't start the season without coming to Saipan. The XTERRA season won't be complete without coming and competing here on Saipan," said Wasle.

Benesch added: I'm very anxious and couldn't wait to come back every time I leave Saipan."

Even Daz Parker, also of the United Kingdom, is puzzled why she and the rest of her fellow pros keep coming back to Saipan. "It's my fourth time here but I don't know why I keep coming back. There's like a magical thing on this island that I can't figure out."

"Maybe it's the climate, the warm people or the beaches. I don't know. It's a mystery. I was once asked 'Where is the nicest place to race?' and I said 'Saipan.'"

Allen is hoping the whole community would get involved and work together to keep both races alive.

"The Tagaman and XTERRA are the kind of races that athletes like me want to be in because it has so much involvement from the community. Everybody is pitching in to make the race successful," said Allen.

"I would encourage everyone on Saipan to unite so both races would last. People have to chip in and work together so that these races won't die. The Saipan Sportsfest is a tradition that needs to be continued."

Marianas Visitors Authority managing director Perry Tenorio said they are always coordinating with their field offices in China, Japan, Korea, and Russia to inform their triathletes about Tagaman and XTERRA, plus all the other sports events on Saipan.

Tenorio said MVA has been working with various airlines to offer lower airfare and baggage fees for visiting triathletes, and at the same time for hotels to give discounted rates.

"For Tagaman and XTERRA, there is also an effort to talk to various airlines to work on giving discounts or lessen fees for bikes. The cost of bringing bikes here is one of the major concerns for triathletes. Of course we are also working with hotels to offer discounted rates for the duration of the events," said Tenorio.

He also took note of the important role played by the volunteers in the success of these races, the people who open their homes for off-island athletes, and those who lend their bikes, parts, and other accessories.

their time to

shine

The making of SSC masters and 'mamas' 3-minute shot at fame

ROSELYNMONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

They've turned from supporters to performers.

Thanks to their 3-minute synchronized swimming routine, Saipan Swim Club "mamas" Kaoru Takahashi, Atsuko Sato, Nami Kadokura, and Ayumi Kaga, and SSC masters Suzy Kindel and Carol Lynn Pierce owned the Kan Pacific Swimming Pool even for just a little while.

Pierce and company almost always take a backseat to their children or grandchild (for Pierce), working as timers, results keeper, race director, and course guide during competitions. However, early this year, there was a role reversal, after they performed a synchronized swimming routine that wowed family members and the rest of the big crowd at the Marpi pool.

The loud cheers were well-deserved, as it took months of painstaking practice to master the steps and techniques, the support of the SSC family, and a trip down memory lane to complete the show.

Challenging, but fun beginning

"The stunts would be much easier if I am younger and still doing Pilates," said Kindel, who is in her 60s. "My biggest challenges are lack of flexibility and bad knee."

Kindel did synchronized swimming before but never coached, so teaching skills to the SSC moms is another hurdle.

Fortunately, Kindel had Pierce to assist her in doing the stunts. Pierce, another sexagenarian, was also into synchronized swimming when she was still young and was very willing to give a hand.

"There were absolutely no second thoughts. It [synchronized swimming] brought back such wonderful memories as a youth and I was able to share those memories and knowledge with others," Pierce said.

Practice times, which were in between one and two hours a week for four months, were divided into learning skills and laughing and giggling as they made one mistake after another.

"It was fun, but during the last week of practice everyone was serious," said Takahashi, who said being a member of a baton twirling club in high school back in Japan helped her do some of the stunts.

Kadokura was never into sports before she came to Saipan so she had a hard time learning the routines.

"I was little bit stressed when we started practicing because the steps were difficult," she said.

However, the fun atmosphere during the practice sessions and the knowledge of both Kindel and Pierce allowed her to pick up the steps.

Sato, who was into skiing, snowboarding, and swimming in Japan and always wanted to do synchronized swimming, said the most difficult part is holding her breath in the water.

"When I have time I practice by myself," she said.

Family affair

Sato also had her children videotape their practice sessions so she can review it at home.

"When I practiced at home they helped with the counting and the music," Sato said.

SSC swimmers were also on deck, singing and playing ukuleles every time they practiced. SSC masters played ukuleles, too, during practice and the actual performance.

"Our fellow masters swimmers also critiqued our rehearsals. It became one big swim family," Pierce said.

"My sons Akira and Wataru played the ukulele and they enjoyed it. For me, it was a dream come true because we performed together," Kadokura said.

Showtime

The day was Jan. 24 at the conclusion of the pentathlon meet late in the morning with both SSC and Tsunami Saipan swimmers getting out of the pool to give way to the group. Parents and other relatives of the swimmers were in attendance, too, eagerly awaiting the day's highlight.

"I didn't expect a lot of people will be watching our performance. I started to get nervous and feel the shaking of my legs," Sato said.

From left, Ayumi Kaga, Tmomi Sato, Atsuko Sato, and Kaoru Takahashi pose for a photo before the start of last month's Tagaman Triathlon.

Takahashi felt the same right at the start of the swim meet and the mounting pressure doubled when she changed costumes to get ready for the performance. Takahashi and the rest of the group were dressed in solid black suit and tights that had lilac asymmetrical lines at the bottom part and with shimmering "flowers" on their left wrist and white caps designed with different flowers. The costumes and accessories were brought by Sato from Japan.

Loud applause greeted the six performers as they formed a line and slowly walked to the pool before facing the audience and taking a bow to start the show.

Once in the water, Kindel and company tried to forget everything and concentrate on their routine.

"I told myself to focus, smile, not forget anything, and not to be nervous. I did not want to get distracted by the cheering audience," Kindel said.

"Once we entered the water I went into automatic mode, technical thinking. Synchronized swimming is the result of practicing individual movements both above and under the water and then collaborating with others. It was a lot of work but at the same time we all laughed and enjoyed the journey," Pierce added.

The group started its routine with a tap, followed by a ballet leg, kip, pinwheel, two-man back dolphin, marching legs, "Eiffel Tower," front walkover with torpedo sculling, and "oceanita" with a 180-degree twist to the tune of The Tokens' *The Lion Sleeps Tonight*. SSC masters and swimmers played the song on their ukuleles, but with the crowd cheering every switch of stunts, others started singing out loud to help the group hear the music.

"We did not expect that kind of support and the cheering meant we could not hear the music so we had to go by our counting system versus the beat of the music, something we had not anticipated," Kindel said.

Despite this challenge, the group got the job done and were greeted with hugs, congratulations, and flowers when they returned on deck.

"It [synchronized swimming] looked very hard to me, but my mom did a very good job," Rinto Takahashi said.

"I was glad to see the smiling faces of so many parents and children on deck. It felt good to spread three minutes of joy to those hardworking swim families," Pierce said.

Do something

The SSC "mamas" are happy that they were able to do something for themselves despite their busy schedule as mothers and No. 1 supporters of their young athletes.

"For more than 10 years, I did not have enough time to do sports here. But when I was given a chance, slowly I started to get involved," said Takahashi, who is also into running and just last month completed the Olympic distance race in the Tagaman Triathlon.

Takahashi encourages mothers like her to try any sports.

Sato, who was also a solo finisher in Tagaman along with Kaga, seconded Takahashi, saying if there's anything that interests you, challenge yourself to do it and have your family support you.

Kadokura said having a common interest among family members strengthens bonds.

"As a mother, I am always busy. I have no days off, so I treasure every moment I spend with my kids, doing things we enjoy together. Next time, I will run with my boys. Time flies so fast and before I know it, they will soon go away so I would like to spend time with my little boyfriends while I still can," Kadokura said.

Kindel does not a have family member at SSC, but found not one but a lot by getting involved with the club's activities.

"One of the greatest achievements from my involvement with synchronized swimming is getting to know the SSC mamas. Getting involved in sports or any activity provides you opportunities to meet people," Kindel said.

"Try a new sport regardless of your age. You won't know your ability or interest until you have tried. Make the time because whatever sport or exercise you choose, it will be good for you mentally, emotionally, and physically."

special sports fest finds a 'pal' for pretty special kids

JIMRAYPHAND
Contributing Writer

A Google search of "My Pal" yields a YouTube music video with that title by a band named "God" (one I had never heard of prior to this search). The entire song (of a punk-rock genre, I think), consists of a mere four lines of original lyrics with a repeating chorus of, "You're my only friend (and) you don't even like me."

Perhaps then, it is by some kind of "divine" intervention that in my curiosity and research to write about the CNMI's 'My Pal' Sports Fest, I would stumble upon an obscure song evoking themes of loneliness and isolation, but more importantly of friendship, at least of our inherent need for friends. Of course, I do not know if that's what the great minds of "God" intended, but that is my interpretation. You see, at the heart of this special sports fest (and every other inclusive event like it) lies the very basic premise that each of us needs a friend and, for some, events like this provide a rare opportunity to engage directly with others in fun, sporting activities.

Sadly, we know that it's children with disabilities who are most often left out of the fold, especially in sporting events where competition makes little to no concessions for any weak-links. Events like the Special Olympics offer a kind of level playing field for those who, through no fault of their own, might not otherwise get to enjoy the rush and adrenaline of an athletic competition.

We know also that children with disabilities are three to four times more likely to be bullied than their non-disabled peers and that friendship is one of the single most effective ways to combat the psychological and physical damage that can result from childhood bullying.

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

In a first of its kind for the CNMI, the 'My Pal' Sports Fest was held over the course of a week last August with the primary intent to have children with disabilities "come out and play"—more specifically, to come out and play with a "pal." Pegged by some as the Special Olympics for the CNMI, the event was conceived from somewhere inside the inner workings of Tan Holdings and garnered support from various private, government and non-profit organizations, all of which provided time and resources to facilitate the event.

Among other things, the event yielded real-life images of young kids with disabilities lighting an Olympic torch, chasing a soccer ball, standing hand-in-hand with their non-disabled peers, and generally being recognized for their participation in events not otherwise available to them.

It's worth noting that the global/worldwide phenomenon that is the Special Olympics, as most of us know it, also took root in this simple notion of providing real-life opportunities for children with disabilities to engage with their non-disabled peers and to participate in games, a novel idea (particularly at the time of its inception in the '60s). It is generally known to be the brainchild of Eunice Kennedy Shriver who reportedly noticed that "children with intellectual disabilities didn't even have a place to play" and so she opened summer day camps in her backyard with a goal to offer a one-to-one ratio of non-disabled counselors—mostly volunteer high school and college students at the time—to campers.

Coincidentally (or maybe not), the CNMI's 'My Pal' Sports Fest also sought to provide a one-to-one ratio of non-disabled "pals" to the participants with disabilities.

CHANGING ATTITUDES

In stark contrast to the prevalent way of thinking which was primarily to focus on the limitations of children with intellectual disabilities, Mrs. Shriver, along with numerous volunteers and fellow advocates, began instead to raise awareness about their abilities. She'd be quoted as saying, "That exceptional children—children with mental retardation—can be exceptional athletes and that through sports they can realize their potential for growth."

The idea was that people with intellectual disabilities don't have to be locked away in rooms, that they can socialize, and that can participate in fun, athletic activities without being a danger to themselves or others. But above all else, that they have talents and dreams and aspirations much like everyone else.

Again per Mrs. Shriver, "That all human beings are created equal in the sense that each has the capacity and a hunger for moral excellence, for courage, for friendship and for love. Whatever the speed of our feet or the power of our arms, each of us is capable of these highest virtues. Intelligence does not limit love, nor does wealth produce friendship."

TO BE FAIR

I have long held that athletics and general competition (team sports/activities, to be more specific) provide a wonderful gateway to a more fulfilled life in the sense of our physical, mental/emotional

and social wellbeing, and for some that is absolutely true. But to be fair, said competitions can also be extremely cruel—survival of the fittest type of environments where only the strongest get to play and the weaker become marginalized. Nothing crushes a young person's soul quite as much as the revelation that he simply can't keep up or that he is not good enough to make the team and, worse, that he isn't wanted on the team.

"Welcome to the real world," some might argue.

And maybe they're right. I mean who could argue against the mechanism for natural selection? No doubt some people are further along in the evolution process than others, at least in the sense that they can dribble a basketball or catch a football or drop-kick a soccer ball better.

Of course, Darwin himself said, "It's not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is most adaptable to change."

THE CHANGE WE NEED

We know with some certainty that intelligence and empathy are formulated in different parts of the brain; therefore, a person does not need to be intelligent in order to feel empathy. And, if we don't need intelligence for survival, then maybe the change we need is to foster a greater sense of empathy—that perhaps one day all people (with a disability or otherwise) will have at least one true pal and, more importantly, an endless number of opportunities to play. TS

FR. JAMES TRIES TO GET HIS GOLF GAME BACK

There was a time when James Balajadia used to spend his weekends ambling across the fairways of a golf course by either practicing his game or playing in a tournament on Saipan.

All of that changed when he decided to enter the seminary and begin his studies for the priesthood. His Saturdays and Sundays, following his ordination last year, are now spent tending to the needs of his parishioners or preparing a sermon for Mass.

Balajadia, the former CNMI National junior golf team member, is now known as Rev. Fr. James S. Balajadia, D.D., after joining the ranks of the Holy Order on Dec. 13, 2014.

"I'm trying to get back to playing golf. It has been tough, since being a priest and a Christian you have to let go of some things. And golf is something that became a part of my life back then. Studying for priesthood for a long time, traveling back and forth, I really haven't had the time to play again," said Balajadia.

He did play a round at Kingfisher one time. "It was so relaxing. I still play, but I don't know if I can be as good as I was back then."

The Mt. Carmel School alumnus, who graduated in 2010, believes that getting back on the course and playing golf again would connect him more with his flock.

"Playing golf is something that I really wanted to get back to because I can also connect with many parishioners in the diocese. I'm actually slowly starting to go back to playing," Balajadia said.

"As a priest, I work on weekends, celebrating Mass, meeting with parishioners, youth groups, and doing other parish work. Though it is not impossible, we'll see. I must first get used to transitioning into being a priest now."

Though he said his days of playing competitive golf are gone, since it will be tough to squeeze it into his busy weekend schedule, he is open to playing at every fundraising tournament.

"I'm still searching for a club or an association. But if there's a tournament, for a good cause, I would join and help out. Do my share to the community. Not to win, but to help people."

When he was growing up, Balajadia also tried different sports like basketball and football, but he got hooked on playing golf where he excelled under the CNMI junior golf program. "I started with the CNMI Junior Golf Association in early 2000 under coach Jeff Taylor."

"Taylor, along with now Attorney General Edward Manibusan, the late Jess Wabol, Eddie Peter, Rod Hodges, and George Taguchi were the bunch who helped us with our golf game. They were the ones who started the junior golf program," said Balajadia.

There were 20 of them back then and his cousin, Frank "The Crank" Camacho, also played and competed under the program. Colorado State University-Pueblo golfer Leina Kim and her brother Michael were also part of the CNMI Jungolf program.

Balajadia said he enjoys the individual side of golf, giving him the chance to spend some time to think. "Of all the sports, golf was the one where I was at my best. The mental toughness it brings, that everything kind of relies on you, you depend on your game."

"You can't blame anyone or anybody else. You have no one to blame but yourself. No one else is there. You're in control of your own destiny. That's what I really liked about golf."

As a junior golfer, Balajadia, who started playing in the 7th grade, won numerous titles in the A and B Flights. Among his notable wins were in the A Flights of the NMC Golf fundraiser and the Tournament of Champions both in 2005 as a 15-year-old.

His victory at TOC earned him an automatic promotion to the Championship Flight where he finished third in 2006 behind CNMI golfing legend Wabol and runner-up Joung-Hoon Park.

The thought of earning a college scholarship and playing golf at the collegiate level in the mainland also crossed his mind. "It crossed my mind, studying in college and getting a golf scholarship. To try to be an athlete, go out and play golf at the collegiate level."

"I would have worked to be a good amateur player in the U.S. Not like the championship caliber of a player or not as a pro, they're at a different level. I would have pursued an amateur career if I did not study to become a priest," said Balajadia.

But the call to serve God's children came. "Playing collegiate golf competed with my desire for priesthood. I had to make a choice and eventually I made the right decision for myself. I surrendered one to pursue the other. I have no regrets."

Balajadia said being inside the church most of the time slowly introduced him to the priestly vocation. "It was a gradual call. It started when I was young since I was also an altar server in Kristo Rai. Most of the time, I was always helping at church and always around priests."

"It was in high school where I really felt the strong urge to enter the seminary, become a priest, and serve God's people. A deep desire from my heart and in my mind that I think being a priest was really something that I would love to become.

"Being a priest, I think I will be good at it, and something that I will enjoy. Something that is ultimately God's will," added Balajadia, who was born in Guam but moved to Saipan when he was 1 year old.

Balajadia advised young kids today to be more active and get involved in sports. "Sports or anything athletic is something healthy to do. Get involved in sports, whether in a team or individually. Values are also formed in playing sports."

He said sports and Christian values shares and teach the same things like discipline, determination, patience, and hard work.

"It is basically the same. You must learn how to work with other people, be humble, ask for help in order to improve, and you sacrifice a lot. So for those young athletes, I would keep encouraging them to pursue their love for sports."

"And at the same time, recognize what faith shares with their sports life and athletic development. All of those values that one learn from playing sports, we have that too in our Christian faith. Work hard and enjoy playing, it is not just about winning but doing your best."

JONPEREZ
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

2014 TSL FOUNDATION/NMASA ATHLETES OF THE YEAR

- **Name:** Beo Ngirchongor
- **Age:** 21
- **Village:** Chalan Kanoa
- **2014 Achievements:** He won the gold medal in the 400m hurdles and 400m run in the 2014 Micronesian Games in Pohnpei.

- **Name:** Rachel Abrams
- **Age:** 19
- **Village:** Chalan Kanoa
- **2014 Achievements:** She earned gold medals in the 100m hurdles, 200m run, and high jump. She also set the new CNMI and Micronesian records in the 200m run.

- **Name:** Gabrielle Race
- **Age:** 17
- **Village:** Capitol Hill
- **2014 Achievements:** She was a gold medalist in the All School's 800m, 1,500m, and 3,000m runs, 4x100m and 4x400m relay, and javelin throw, and was part of the CNMI Women's National Team that routed Macau in the East Asian Football Federation tournament.

- **Name:** Robbie Schorr
- **Age:** 12
- **Village:** Capitol Hill
- **2014 Achievements:** He is ranked No. 1 in the boys U12 division in the North Pacific after winning the regional tournament. She also clinched the doubles crown in the 2014 Pacific Oceania Junior Championships and was a semifinalist in the singles event of the same tournament.

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